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Some Bay Area Democrats may oppose Iraq attack Barbara Lee is finding support for opposition to military action

[Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau](#)

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Washington -- Rep. Barbara Lee of Oakland stood alone last September, casting the only "no" vote when the House gave President Bush backing for the war against terrorists. But now several of her Bay Area Democratic colleagues say they'll join her stance if Bush seeks a resolution authorizing military action against Iraq.

"Barbara Lee had it right," said Rep. Pete Stark, D-Fremont, a 15-term congressman who voted with the president last September. "I'm sorry I voted for the resolution."

Stark will get a chance to express that feeling on the floor of the House because the White House said again Tuesday that it planned to seek a congressional resolution supporting the president's tough line toward Iraq, although Bush hasn't yet said exactly how he intends to bring down Saddam Hussein.

Many Democrats say they don't want a vote before November, fearing that Bush wants to turn Iraq into a campaign issue, but Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., said Tuesday he expected a vote well before the election.

Stark, who voted against the 1991 resolution that authorized Bush's father to use military force to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait, said the current president had twisted last September's resolution beyond its intent to find the perpetrators of the terror attacks.

"Something has to change," Stark added. "You've got some dots to connect to show that Iraq poses an imminent danger to us."

In 1991, the House voted 250-183 to back the elder Bush in the Persian Gulf War. Seven of the nine members in the Bay Area's House delegation at the time, all but one of them Democrats, voted against the measure.

The views of the current 11-member local delegation again show the Bay Area marches to a different drummer. Observers expect both houses of Congress to back Bush on Iraq.

Polls in California and nationally also show that a majority of Americans would support military action to oust Hussein, although they want Bush to form an international coalition to support an attack and would like to see U.N. action first.

South Bay first-term Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, said he needed to see much more convincing evidence that Hussein plans an attack against America before he would vote for military action. "I wouldn't vote to support it without more debate," he said.

Honda said he would reconsider if Bush presented clear evidence, much as President John F. Kennedy did in 1962 when he showed that the Soviet Union was placing nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. "That's

Lee said that she viewed a potential war with Iraq as an unprecedented action in U.S. history.

WAR TALK 'MORALLY WRONG'

"Any talk of war I personally feel is morally wrong, and a military strike should not be authorized by Congress," she said.

"I don't believe ever in our history have we executed a pre-emptive strike on a country where no one has seen the evidence on what the threat is," Lee said recently.

Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Marin, said, "I would vote no. I don't believe our world, our nation, our communities or we as individuals will be safer by going to war against Iraq."

Woolsey said constituents' communications with her office were running about 200 to 1 against attacking Iraq.

Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, who like Stark voted in favor of last September's resolution but against the 1991 measure, wouldn't say how he intended to vote this time.

But he hopes the president will give the U.N. time to put its new inspection program into place.

Among other Democratic members, Reps. Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, Zoe Lofgren of San Jose, Anna Eshoo of Atherton and Mike Thompson of Napa have all expressed reservations about military action.

Pelosi, the House minority whip and the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, "is willing to listen to the president," said spokesman Brendan Daly. But she has asked about how imminent the Iraqi threat from weapons of mass destruction actually is and is worried about how long the United States would have to occupy Iraq if Hussein is overthrown.

Pelosi voted against the 1991 resolution.

Thompson said Bush should allow his "saber rattling" to work. "If this saber rattling allows him to get Saddam to open the country to weapons inspectors, it's all for the best," he said. "War should be our very last option."

LANTOS, TAUSCHER MOST HAWKISH

Of the Bay Area's 11 Democratic House members, Reps. Tom Lantos of San Mateo and Ellen Tauscher of Walnut Creek, are the most hawkish on unseating Hussein. Lantos voted for the 1991 resolution.

Tauscher said she was unhappy that Bush might be pushing the U.N. too fast and thought a pre-election vote would be wrong, but Hussein must be forced out.

"Saddam Hussein . . . is irresponsible, with a voracious appetite for weapons of mass destruction and the willingness to use them," she said.

In the Senate, California Democrats Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, who as Marin's congresswoman in 1991 voted against the Gulf War resolution, have both pressed Bush for more information about a possible attack but haven't taken a position on a possible resolution.

E-mail Edward Epstein at eedstein@sfgate.com.

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